

Successfully Reading Your Textbook

In college your math class moves at about twice the pace as a high school class, and your college math instructor does not have the class time to cover every topic in great detail. This places the responsibility on you for learning the material. You will get more out of class and understand the material easier if you read the section before class. By reading ahead, you are exposing your brain to the topic. The more often you expose yourself to the material, the better you will internalize it. Here are some suggestions when reading your math textbook.

1. **Slow down!!** A math textbook does not read like a novel or other types of textbooks. It is difficult and requires much time. It takes total concentration and every word counts.
2. **Skim** the section. Read the section heading and subheadings, introduction, summary (sometimes found at the end of the chapter), key words, and try and get an overview of what is being presented. Think about how this topic connects to what you already know.
3. **Read with a highlighter** in hand. Highlight the main ideas or terms. Do not highlight more than 50 percent of a page because the goal is to narrow down the material for future study.
4. **Understand** each sentence before you go on. Math books are not repetitive, so if you miss a concept you will probably not pick up the missed information from reading on. You may need to reread it many times to understand the idea. Study diagrams and illustrations, and ask yourself how they illustrate the concept.
5. **Place a question mark** next to confusing material. Reread the material several times to see if there is something you missed. If the concept becomes clear to you go back and erase the marks. It can be helpful to read aloud the misunderstood information. If it is still unclear, read on to see if there are examples or something in the next page to clarify the concept.

6. **Try and work some problems.** To deepen your understanding of an example, rework the example without looking at the solution. If you get stuck, look at the solution, and then try again to rework the problem. Many textbooks have practice problems in the margin for you to try.

7. **Take notes.** On a separate piece of paper write the title of the section, record key terms, formulas, or properties, summarize the main idea, and include some examples. This will help you retain the information and can be helpful for future study.

8. **After lecture,** if you still have questions, reread the section and look for understanding for previous misunderstood material. For additional help, refer to another textbook, check out a video, talk to a study partner, visit the Math Learning Center for help, or ask your instructor.

There may be times when it is unrealistic to expect yourself to read the textbook to the extent explained above. If you are unable to read ahead, then arrive to class five minutes early and read the objectives for the section that will be covered that day. Mark the objective you do not understand and pay close attention when the instructor covers that objective.